

Message Text

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E. O. 11652:NA

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UK

SUBJECT: WILL THE CONSERVATIVE LORDS (AND LADIES) BLINK?

REF: LONDON 17614, 18020

SUMMARY: BUOYED UP BY CONSERVATIVE SUCCESSES IN RECENT
BY-ELECTIONS AND BY DEFEAT OF GOVERNMENT IN HOUSE OF
COMMONS, NOVEMBER 10, CONSERVATIVE PEERS IN HOUSE OF
LORDS ARE MAINTAINING SOME FLEXIBILITY IN THEIR POLICIES,
HOPING TO PRECLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONSTITUTIONAL
CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE TWO HOUSES AND AT THE SAME TIME

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TO PRESERVE WHAT THEY SEE AS THE PROPER ROLE FOR THE

HOUSE OF LORDS (REVIEW AND AMEND' IF NECESSARY, COMMONS' LEGISLATION). IN FINAL ANALYSIS' CONSERVATIVE PEERS MAY CHOOSE ONE OR TWO OF THE CONTROVERSIAL BILLS, POSSIBLY DOCK WORK SCHEME OR AIRCRAFT-SHIPBUILDING NATIONALIZATION ON WHICH TO MAKE A STAND, BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT THE LABOR BENCHES ARE DIVIDED ON THESE ISSUES AND THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT RISK FURTHER DEFEATS. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A BRIEF PRESENTATION ON CONSERVATIVE POLICY TO A MIXED GROUP OF DIPLOMATS STATIONED IN LONDON NOVEMBER 10, BARONESS ELLES, WHO IS A LEADING CONSERVATIVE PEER, PARTICULARLY ON FOREIGN POLICY QUESTIONS, SAID THAT CONSERVATIVES IN HOUSE OF LORDS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TO "SWALLOW".ULTIMATELY'REJECTION OF MOST OF LORDS AMENDMENTS ON FIVE CONTROVERSIAL BILLS PASSED BY HOUSE OF COMMONS. LADY ELLES SAID CONSERVATIVE PEERS WERE NOT PREPARED "AT THIS TIME" TO PROVOKE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFRONTATION BETWEEN COMMONS AND LORDS (SEE REFTELS).

2. LADY ELLES DESCRIBED CONSERVATIVE ACTIONS IN HOUSE OF LORDS AS "MORE TRULY REFLECTING" SENTIMENTS OF COUNTRY IN OPPOSING LABOR GOVERNMENT'S CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION. IN THIS RESPECT CONSERVATIVES IN HOUSE OF LORDS WERE CONVINCED OF THE RIGHTNESS OF THEIR POSITION BY RESULTS OF LAST WEEK'S BY-ELECTIONS (REF. LONDON L7828).

3. DESCRIBING GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO PUSH THROUGH CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION AS "INHUMAN," ELLES SAID HOUSE OF LORDS HAD BEEN COOPERATIVE IN AGREEING TO RESUME SITTINGS EARLY, CURTAILING RECESS IN AN EFFORT TO DISCUSS AND DEBATE FULLY GOVERNMENT'S LEGISLATION. IN SPITE OF AGREEING TO RETURN FROM RECESS EARLY, LORDS HAD HAD TO HOLD NUMBER OF ALL-NIGHT SITTINGS WITH NO RELIEF IN SIGHT. LORDS WOULD NOT, SHE SAID, ABANDON THEIR OBLIGATION TO REVIEW COMMONS' LEGISLATION AND "IMPROVE" IT.

4. ELLOS CALLED MEDIA CRITICISMS OF HOUSE OF LORDS ACTIONS UNJUSTIFIED. CONSERVATIVES, SHE SAID, FELT ENTITLED TO FULL DISCUSSION OF CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AND CONSIDERED NECESSARY THAT LEGISLATION BE LOOKED AT MORE THAN SUPERFICIALLY. LORDS TRADITIONALLY HAVE HAD FUNCTION OF REVIEWING COMMONS LEGISLATION, WHICH IN THIS INSTANCE HAD BEEN CRAMMED THROUGH WITHOUT ADEQUATE DELIBERATION, TO MAKE FINAL LEGISLATION BEST POSSIBLE. MEDIA CRITICISMS THAT HOUSE OF LORDS DOMINATED BY OUT-MODED TORY MAJORITY WERE IN FACT FALSE, SHE SAID, SINCE GOVERNMENT CONTINUED TO BE UNABLE TO DEFEND ITS LEGISLATIO

IN LORDS WITH SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF LABOR PEERS
CHRONICALLY ABSENT. WHAT WAS HAPPENING, THEREFORE, SHE
SAID, REPRESENTED A REFUSAL OF ONE GROUP OF LABOR PARTY
TO SUPPORT LEGISLATION PASSED BY LEFT-WING DOMINATED
LABOR MPS.

5. ELLES REVEALED IN ANSWERING QUESTIONS THAT CONSERVATIV
TACTICS IN LORDS ARE FLUID AND WILL IN FUTURE CHANGE TO
REFLECT COMMONS RESPONSE TO LORDS AMENDMENTS (SEE SEPT
REPORTING GOVERNMENTS DEFEATS IN COMMONS NOVEMBER 10).

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6. COMMENT: CONSERVATIVES HAVE OBVIOUS TACTICAL ADVANTAGE IN CREATING AS MUCH DIFFICULTY FOR GOVERNMENT AS POSSIBLE IN COMPLETING CONTROVERSIAL LEGISLATION IN PRESENT SESSION. LADY ELLES SEEMED TO BE SAYING THAT CONSERVATIVES HOPE TO PRESS THEIR ADVANTAGE UP TO POINT WHERE GOVERNMENT MIGHT THREATEN EITHER REFORM OF HOUSE OF LORDS OR BLANKET CREATION OF NEW AND PRESUMABLY MORE ACTIVE LABOR PEERAGE TO SOLVE GOVERNMENT'S DILEMMA.

7. SOME CONSERVATIVE MPS BELIEVE PARTY'S INTERESTS CAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BEST BE SERVED BY FORCING GOVERNMENT TO EITHER ALTERNATIVE A FEW MPS HAVE TOLD EMBASSY OFFICERS THAT CONSERVATIVES SHOULD STAND FIRM IN HOUSE OF LORDS AND "NOT BLINK," SINCE BY-ELECTIONS HAVE DEMONSTRATED POPULAR DISAPPROVAL OF GOVERNMENT AND ITS CURRENT ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STRATEGIES. ONE MP ON SHADOW CABINET FEELS THAT CONSERVATIVES SHOULD CHOOSE ONE OF BILLS, PERHAPS DOCK WORK OR AIRCRAFT-SHIPBUILDING NATIONALIZATION ON WHICH THERE IS DIVIDED OPINION ON LABOR BENCHES, AS POINT ON WHICH TO MAKE A FIRM STAND; WITH WIDE RANGE OF OTHER PROBLEMS BESETTING GOVERNMENT, HE FEELS LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP WILL BACK AWAY IF CONSERVATIVES ARE FIRM ENOUGH.
ARMSTRONG.

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